

## ADVERTISING AND SOCIAL CHARACTER: ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

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**Abstract :** Today, advertising has become all pervasive and persuasive. There is no choice between advertising and not advertising. It has become an inevitable condition of staying competitively in the field of business. The proliferation and the intrusion of various media into the everyday lives of the citizenry make advertising environmental in nature, persistently encountered, and involuntarily experienced by the entire population. Most of the criticism of advertising comes from those who focus on advertising's social role, whereas most of its defense comes from those who emphasize its economic functions.

The unintended consequences of most of the advertisements may find expression in their outcomes of encouraging unsafe behaviour, confused assessment of products, encouragement of inappropriate standards for choice, promotion of parent – child conflict, modeling of hazardous behaviour, and reinforcement of sex role stereotypes, cynicism, and selfishness.

In the ultimate analysis, it could be stated that there is a real need for an independent, comprehensive, and systematic comparative enquiry into advertising in all its many aspects. Such an enquiry, which is long overdue, should ascertain both the direct and indirect, the intended and the unintended effects, and should provide the base for decisions that are found to be required and any new policies that may result from them.

**Keywords:** Social Behaviour, Irrational Consumer, Hazardous Behaviour, Top- of – mind Behaviour, Commercial Persuasion, Ethical Values.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Today, advertising has become all pervasive and persuasive. There is no choice between advertising and not advertising. It has become an inevitable condition of staying competitively in the field of business. The proliferation and the intrusion of various media into the everyday lives of the citizenry make advertising environmental in nature, persistently encountered, and involuntarily experienced by the entire population. Most of the criticism of advertising comes from those who focus on advertising's social role, whereas most of its defense comes from those who emphasize its economic functions.

#### **Different Approaches to Marketing**

The issues connected with advertising and advertisements are approached differently by different people belonging to different walks of life. The psychologists view advertising as a source of learning or conditioning with cognitive and affective results. The sociologists emphasize the role modeling aspects of advertising and its impact on social behaviours. Anthropologists see advertising in terms of rituals and symbols – incantations to give meaning to material objects and artifacts. Educators question the influence of advertising on child development. The communications specialists view ads as propaganda and question their role within and influence upon mass media.

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Advertising has been regarded as a form of communication. It has been criticized for playing on emotions, simplifying real human situations into stereotypes, exploiting anxieties, and employing techniques of intensive persuasion that amount to manipulation.

### Objectives of the Study:

- ✍ To identify the relationship between advertising and social character.
- ✍ To examine the intended and unintended consequences of Advertising.
- ✍ To examine social costs of Advertising.

### Criticism on Advertising

Many social critics have stated that advertising is essentially concerned with exalting the materialistic virtues of consumption by exploiting achievement drives and emulative anxieties, employing tactics of hidden manipulation, playing on emotions, maximizing appeal and minimizing information, trivializing, eliminating objective considerations, contriving illogical situations and generally reducing men, women and children to the role of irrational consumer. Criticism expressed in such a way may be overstated but it cannot be entirely brushed aside.

### Unintended and Intended Consequences

The unintended consequences of most of the advertisements may find expression in their outcomes of encouraging unsafe behaviour, confused assessment of products, encouragement of inappropriate standards for choice, promotion of parent – child conflict, modeling of hazardous behaviour, and reinforcement of sex role stereotypes, cynicism, and selfishness.

The intent of advertising, especially in the aggregate, is to preoccupy society with material concerns, seeing commercially available goods or services as the path to happiness and the solution to virtually all problems and needs. In so doing, advertising make consumption a “top – of- mind behaviour”. Commercial persuasion appears to programme not only our shopping and product use behaviour but also the larger domain of our social roles, language goals, values, and the sources of meaning in our culture.

The potential for advertising to penetrate our consciousness and channel our very modes of thinking is seen as highly likely, if not for individual ads, then at least for advertising in the aggregate. This is precisely due to the following prominent reasons:

- a. It is pervasive, appearing in many modes and media;
- b. Repetitive, reinforcing the same or similar ideas relentlessly;
- c. Professionally developed, with all of the attendant research sophistications to improve the probabilities of attention, comprehension, retention and behavioural impact; and
- d. Delivered to an audience that is increasingly detached from traditional sources of cultural influence like families, schools, or temples.

It should be clearly noted that advertising begins to play a more subtle role in changing habits than merely stimulating wants. The viewer's self-respect may require a rejection of most commercials on the conscious level, alongwith some ridicule. Beneath the ridicule the commercial does its work. Though at first the changes are primarily in manners, dress, taste, and food habits, sooner or later they begin to affect more basic patterns: the structure of authority in the family, the role of children and young adults as independent consumers in the society, the pattern of morals, and the different meanings of achievement in the society. In this context, the relevant doubt is whether the advertisers are “training” people as consumers or “educating” people as people.

If advertising has invaded the judgment of children, it has also forced its way into the family, an insolent usurper of parental function, degrading parents to mere intermediaries between their children and the market.

### Social Costs of Advertising

The social costs of advertising may find expression in the forms of envy, emulations and competition in the minds of the viewers. Two processes could be involved in this type of response. First, the inaccessibility of the products and services being advertised may create in some viewer's feelings of frustration sufficient to make them engage in anti- social acts of violence and theft. Second, the arousal

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process associated with the ad itself may have untold behavioural consequences about which very little is known. Much advertising is designed to gain attention and build positive attitudes to brands essentially by a tension- arousal and tension – reduction process. If, for a number of reasons, frustration is possible that aggressive acts of one kind or another may follow.

Advertising is seen by many as a threat to the cultural identity and self – realization of many developing countries. It brings to many people alien ethical values. It may deviate consumer demands in developing countries to areas which can inhibit developmental priorities. It affects and can often deform ways of life and life styles.

It is very interesting to note that our language is potentially affected by advertising. Advertising is a symbol – manipulating occupation. The symbols of fashion and elegance are used to glamorize clothing and cosmetics. The symbols of youthful gaiety sell soft drinks and candy bars. The symbols of adventure and sportsmanship are used to promote cigarettes and liquor. In this sense, advertising is a tremendous creator and devourer of symbols. Even the symbols of patriotism are used for the purposes of salesmanship. Not even the symbols of religion are off limits – Christmas and Easter are so strenuously exploited commercially that they almost lose their religious significance.

Identification with society or at least the appropriation of life style roles therein, is easily affected by advertising. It requires only the wit to buy recognized brands with symbolic value. Today, such brands, badges providing identity, are proudly displayed on shoes and shirts, on pants and hats – from tip to toe, from fronts to backs. To use a brand of car, drink, smoke, or food that is nationally advertised gives a man the feeling that he belongs to something bigger than himself. He is part of a process or a culture that contains and nourishes him. The irrational basis of the appeals made to him by the ads reinforces a sense of false prestige and pseudo – identify.

### Conclusion:

In the ultimate analysis, it could be stated that there is a real need for an independent, comprehensive, and systematic comparative enquiry into advertising in all its many aspects. Such an enquiry, which is long overdue, should ascertain both the direct and indirect, the intended and the unintended effects, and should provide the base for decisions that are found to be required and any new policies that may result from them.

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